

# HOW TO REACH THE JEW FOR CHRIST

by

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### FROM CONSTANTINE TO THE ERA OF THE CRUSADES (313-1096 A.D.)

This lesson, covering seven centuries of time, from the fourth to the eleventh centuries A.D., will be studied under three headings:

- A. The Jews Under Rome
- B. The Jews in Asia
- C. The Jews in Spain

#### A. THE JEWS UNDER ROME

The heathen emperors of Rome persecuted the Jews. We condemn them for this, but we can see some reason for their acts. To the Roman, the Jew was an insurrectionist. The Roman said Caesar was Lord, the Jew said *Adonai* was Lord. As a means of self-preservation, the Caesars must overcome the Jews.

In the year 313 A.D., the Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity. No longer was there any conflict with regard to loyalties. Roman emperor and despised Jew both worshipped the same God. There was no reason or even an excuse to persecute the Jew. But when the eagle gave way to the cross, the people who outwardly wore the symbol of Christ's suffering proved that they had never experienced Him in their lives.

Constantine made conversion to Judaism a penal offense. On pain of death, the Jews were prohibited from exercising the rite of circumcision. Constantine went further and punished with the death penalty any marriage between Christians and Jews. Under the Byzantine emperors, Justin and Justinian, the Jews were deprived of all political privileges. In Roman Africa, the Jews were prevented from exercising their religion and were forbidden to train their children in the faith.

In this manner, the Jews were persecuted by the so-called "Christian" emperors of Rome. What about the revered Christian Fathers?

The careful student of Church history will note in the writings of these men a terrible lack of Christian feeling toward the Jews, to say the least. Even such honored men as Jerome, Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria led the people against the Jews. At the instigation of the Church Fathers, all kinds of restrictions were laid upon the Jews and exactions made upon their properties.

## **B. THE JEWS IN ASIA**

The Jews were forced to flee as far as possible from the talons of so-called "Christian" Rome. Many of them fled to Babylonia where they formed the famous school of Babylonian Talmudists. Others went to Gaul and the Teutonic lands, and still others retreated into Arabia.

The Arabian Jews in time became like the Arabs. They looked like them, talked like them, their own sheiks led them into battle, and poets of their own wrote songs for them in Arabic.

Outwardly the Jews seemed to have been assimilated into an Arabian tribe. Inwardly, however, they remained a "separated people." They cherished the Bible; the Arabs called them "the people of the Book." They earnestly tried to remain faithful to the one true God.

About this time, an Arab merchant named Mohammed began preaching a new religion which was remarkably like Judaism in its conception of God and the prophets. The Jews at first showed interest in his preachings. Mohammed maintained that he had been sent by God, and some Jews even believed that he was the Messiah. But when they knew Mohammed a little better, they realized that he was an ignoramus and that he was interested more in the ways of pretty women than he was in the Way of God. When Mohammed grew powerful enough, he turned and wrought vengeance upon the Jews. It was another dark day for the Jews.

Early in the eighth century, however, a new day began to dawn. When the Mohammedans attacked the armies of Persia and of Christian nations, the Jews began slowly to lift themselves out of the mire. Mohammed was dead and his hatred of the Jews died with him. The Mohammedans became strangely tolerant of the Jews. Fierce, bloodthirsty Mohammedans treated the Jews far better than did the followers of Him who taught His disciples to love even their enemies.

## **C. THE JEWS IN SPAIN**

The Mohammedan invasions reduced the Western world to chaos and inaugurated the Dark Ages in Christian lands.

The light of civilization was held aloft not by Christian nations but by the Mohammedans. While Christian Europe lay in darkness, Mohammedan Cordova in Spain was the center of civilization, art and letters. The Jews had equal rights and privileges and rivaled their master in wealth and influence. The Jews of this age reached considerable eminence in literature, science and philosophy.

One of the most noted Jewish scholars of this period was Maimonides.

His *Guide for the Perplexed* is an attempt to set down in a clear and logical manner, sound reasons for all of the Jewish beliefs. He also wrote voluminously on arithmetic, medicine and law.

Most people consider civilization a by-product of Christianity. It was not always this. When Christendom was settling in the mire of the Dark Ages, the Jews planted the seeds of learning among the people of the so-called “Christian” nations. This resuscitation of Hellenic science and philosophy was the forerunner of the Renaissance. But once more the nations of the world were to take the seeds of growth from the Jew and pay them in deeds of cruelty and bloodthirstiness.

The story of the Crusades will be studied in our next chapter.

### EXAMINATION

1. Describe the treatment of the Jews by the so-called “Christian” emperors of Rome.
2. What was the attitude of the Church Fathers toward the Jews?
3. Describe the Arabian Jews.
4. Who was Mohammed? In what way does he enter Jewish history?
5. Who was Maimonides? What was his *Guide for the Perplexed*?

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